



# M E D I A   R E L E A S E

STATE OF TENNESSEE  
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

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## **Federal Monitor Updates U.S. District Court On Continuing Improvements at DCS**

*Department 'Has Much To Show For Its Effort,' Progress Report Notes*

NASHVILLE - A federal monitor's report, filed today in U.S. District Court, confirms that the Tennessee Department of Children's Services continues to make sweeping changes that are already leading to significant improvements in families' lives.

While DCS still has work to do before it can exit federal court oversight, the department has greatly reduced the number of children in state custody, increased adoptions, developed state-of-the-art data-analysis tools and incorporated innovative programs designed to help children find the permanency they need in their lives.

"We are very pleased. We know where we stand. We've been hard at work, and we're still hard at work," said Dr. Viola P. Miller, the DCS commissioner. "There were absolutely no surprises in the latest monitor's report - which is exactly how you want it to be."

Under the *Brian A.* consent decree, DCS pledged to improve the functioning of the department and to embrace the best-practice standards for every aspect of child-welfare policy and practice.

"In the six years since the entry of the *Brian A.* Settlement agreement," the monitoring report states, "the department has much to show for its effort."

The most recent monitor's report points out "areas in which the Department's hard work has achieved demonstrably better results for children and families."

Among them:

- Only 10 percent of children entering care are now placed in congregate care settings, half the rate of such placements six years ago. Congregate care placements are in non-family settings, including group homes.
- Eighty-five percent of children who came into care in 2006 as part of a sibling group were placed together, a substantially higher rate than many systems achieve.
- There are fewer children in foster care now than at any time since the entry of the Settlement Agreement, and the department has accomplished this reduction while maintaining a stable rate of re-entry into foster care.
- DCS has been recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for impressive increases in the number of children for whom it has successfully found adoptive homes.
- The department now routinely seeks a permanent family for every child in its care.

Meantime, DCS remains committed to improving its performance even more, specifically focusing on higher quality casework. DCS also recognizes that it needs to attract even more relative caregivers and to support better all of its resource parents.

The *Brian A.* lawsuit was filed by New York-based Children's Rights Inc. on behalf of Tennessee's foster children.

A group of noted public-child-welfare experts from around the country - the Technical Assistance Committee - serves as the federal court monitor, while also advising and assisting DCS in its ongoing reform efforts.

The consent decree is in the court of U.S. District Judge Todd J. Campbell in Nashville.

The department currently has 8,313 children in state custody. Of those, 6,462 are in foster care, the population that is covered by the *Brian A.* settlement agreement.

The remaining youth have been adjudicated delinquent by the state's juvenile court judges and placed into DCS custody.

The report is available at [www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/TACReport9.12.07.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/youth/dcsguide/TACReport9.12.07.pdf)